



THE
CONNOISSEUR.

By Mr. T O W N,
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*Quippe ita formido mortales continet omnes,
Quod multa in terris fieri, cæloque tuentur,
Quorum operum causas nulla ratione videre
Possunt. — —*

LUCRET.

Mr. VILLAGE to Mr. TOWN.

DEAR COUSIN!

March 3, 1755.



was greatly entertained with your late reflections on the several branches of magic made use of in the affairs of love. I have myself been very lately among the Seers of Visions and Dreamers of Dreams: and hope you will not be displeased at an account of portents and prognostics full as extravagant, though they are not all owing to the same cause, as those of your correspondent Miss *Arabella Whimsy*. You must know, Cousin, that I am just returned from a visit of a fortnight to an old aunt

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in the North; where I was mightily diverted with the traditional superstitions, which are most religiously preserved in the family, as they have been delivered down, time out of mind, from their sagacious grandmothers.

WHEN I arrived, I found the mistress of the house very busily employed with her two daughters in nailing an horseshoe to the threshold of the door. This they told me, was to guard against the spiteful designs of an old woman, who was a witch, and had threatened to do the family a mischief, because one of my young cousins laid two straws across, to see if the old hag could walk over them. The young lady herself assured me, that she had several times heard Goody *Cripple* muttering to herself; and to be sure she was saying the Lord's Prayer backwards. Besides, the old woman had very often asked them for a pin: but they took care never to give her any thing that was sharp, because she should not bewitch them. They afterwards told me many other particulars of this kind, the same as are mentioned with infinite humour by the *SPECTATOR*: and to confirm them, they assured me, that the eldest Miss, when she was little, used to have fits, till the mother flung a knife at another old witch, (whom the devil had carried off in a high wind) and fetched blood from her.

WHEN I was to go to bed, my aunt made a thousand apologies for not putting me in the best room in the house, which she said had never been lain in, since the death of an old washer-woman, who walked every night, and haunted that room in particular. They fancied that the old woman had hid money somewhere, and could not rest till she had told somebody; and my cousin assured me, that she might have had it all to herself, for the spirit came one night to her bed-side, and wanted to tell her, but she had not cou-

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rage to speak to it. I learned also that they had a footman once, who hanged himself for love; and he walked for a great while, till they got the parson to lay him in the Red Sea.

I HAD not been here long, when an accident happened, which very much alarmed the whole family. *Towzer* one night howled most terribly; which was a sure sign, that somebody belonging to them would die. The youngest Miss declared that she had heard the hen crow that morning; which was another fatal prognostic. They told me, that just before uncle died, *Towzer* howled so for several nights together, that they could not quiet him; and my aunt heard the death-watch tick as plainly as if there had been a clock in the room: the maid too, who sat up with him, heard a bell toll at the top of the stairs, the very moment the breath went out of his body. During this discourse, I overheard one of my cousins whisper the other, that she was afraid their mamma would not live long; for she smelt an ugly smell, like a dead body. They had a dairy-maid, who died the very week after an hearse had stopt at their door in its way to church; and the eldest miss, when she was but thirteen, saw her own brother's ghost, (who was gone to the *West-Indies*) walking in the garden; and to be sure nine months after, they had an account, that he died on board the ship, the very same day, and hour of the day, that Miss saw his apparition.

I NEED not mention to you the common incidents, which were accounted by them no less prophetic. If a cinder popped from the fire, they were in haste to examine whether it was a purse or a coffin. They were aware of my arrival long before I came, because they had seen a stranger on the grate. The youngest Miss will let nobody
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use the poker but herself; because, when she stirs it, it always burns bright, which is a sign she will have a bright husband: and she is no less sure of a good one, because she generally has ill luck at cards. Nor is the candle less oracular than the fire: for the squire of the parish came one night to pay them a visit, when the tallow winding-sheet pointed towards him, and he broke his neck soon after in a fox-chase. My aunt one night observed with great pleasure a letter in the candle; and she hoped it would be from her son in *London*. We knew, when a spirit was in the room, by the candle burning blue: but poor cousin *Nancy* was ready to cry one time, when she snuffed it out and could not blow it in again, though her sister did it at a whiff.

WE had no occasion for an almanack or the weather-glass, to let us know whether it would rain or shine. One evening I proposed to ride out with my cousins the next day to see a gentleman's house in the neighbourhood; but my aunt assured us it would be wet, she knew very well from the shooting of her corn. Besides, there was a great spider crawling up the chimney, and the blackbird in the kitchen began to sing: which were both of them as certain forerunners of rain. But the most to be depended on in these cases is a tabby cat, which is usually basking on the parlour hearth. If the cat turned her tail to the fire, we were to have a hard frost: if she licked her tail, rain would certainly ensue. They wondered what stranger they should see; because Puss washed her foot over her left ear. The old lady complained of a cold, and her daughter remarked, it would go through the family; for she observed that poor *Tab* had sneezed several times. Poor *Tab* however once flew at one of my cousins; for which she had like to have been destroyed, as the whole family began to think she was no other than a witch.

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It is impossible to tell you the several tokens, by which they know whether good or ill luck will happen to them. Spilling of salt, or laying knives across, are every where accounted ill omens; but a pin with the head turned towards you, or to be followed by a strange dog, I found were very lucky. I heard one of my cousins tell the cookmaid, that she boiled away all her sweethearts, because she had let her dishwater boil over. The same young lady one morning came down to breakfast with her cap the wrong side out; which the mother observing, charged her not to alter it all the day, for fear she should turn luck.

BUT, above all, I could not help remarking the various prognostics, which the old lady and her daughters used to collect from almost every part of the body. A white speck upon the nails made them as sure of a gift, as if they had it already in their pockets. The eldest sister is to have one husband more than the youngest, because she has one wrinkle more in her forehead; but the other will have the advantage of her in the number of children, as was plainly proved by snapping their finger-joints. It would take up too much room, to set down every circumstance which I observed of this sort during my stay with them: I shall therefore conclude my letter with the several remarks on the rest of the body, as far as I could learn them from this prophetic family: for as I was a relation, you know, they had less reserve.

If the head itches, it is a sign of rain. If the head aches, it is a profitable pain. If you have the tooth-ach, you don't love true. If your eye-brow itches, you will see a stranger. If your right eye itches, you will cry; if your left you will laugh. If your nose itches, you will shake hands, kiss a fool, drink a glass of wine, run against a

cuckold's door, or miss them all four. If your right ear or cheek burns, your left friends are talking of you; if your left, your right friends are talking of you. If your elbow itches, you will change your bedfellow. If your right hand itches, you will pay away money; if your left, you will receive. If your stomach itches, you will eat pudding. If your gartering-place itches, you will go to a strange place. If your back itches, butter will be cheap when grass grows there. If your side itches, somebody is wishing for you. If your knee itches, you will kneel in a strange church: If your foot, you will tread upon strange ground. Lastly, if you shiver, some body is walking over your grave.

I am, Dear Cousin, yours &c.

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